



NEWS RELEASE

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CRAIG RESIDENT PLEADS GUILTY TO WILDLIFE VIOLATIONS

Anchorage, Alaska – Acting United States Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced today, December 22, 2008 that Christopher R. Rowland, resident of Craig, Alaska, pleaded guilty in federal court in Anchorage to violations of the Lacey Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Mr. Rowland, age 41, pleaded guilty to four counts before Chief United States District Court Judge John W. Sedwick. In connection with the guilty plea, Special Assistant United States Attorney John C. Reardon advised the court that Mr. Rowland was involved in the illegal taking, transportation and sale of sea otters.

According to court documents, Mr. Rowland's guilty plea is in connection with an investigation in Southeast Alaska regarding the illegal hunting, killing, and export of sea otters, sea lions and harbor seals and the illegal sale of their pelts. Court testimony revealed that the investigation started as a response to a concerned citizen's tip that led to a two-year undercover operation into the illegal commercialization of sea otters, seals, and sea lions, all of which are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. During the undercover operation, agents documented the illegal take of sea otters, the illegal sale of their pelts, and the failure to record and report harvest data as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The undercover operation revealed suspected violations of the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Lacey Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Search warrants have been served in the communities of Ketchikan, Sitka, and Craig, Alaska. Interviews have been conducted in these communities, as well as in Edna Bay and Hoonah, Alaska, and Seattle, Washington.

According to court documents, during the course of the investigation, whole tanned sea otter pelts were illegally sold for \$1,000 and raw, unprocessed pelts for \$100 per foot. The investigation is ongoing.

Judge Sedwick scheduled Rowland's sentencing for March 9, 2009. The law provides for a total sentence of 5 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release. Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the actual sentence imposed is based upon the seriousness of the offenses and the criminal history, if any, of the defendant. The plea agreement filed with the court recommends a sentence of 37 months in prison, 3 years of supervised release and a fine of \$5,000. The sentence will ultimately be determined by the court.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service led the investigation that led to the prosecution of Mr. Rowland. That investigation and today's prosecution benefitted significantly from the support of Alaska Wildlife Troopers, NOAA Fisheries' Office of Law Enforcement, U.S. Forest Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Marshals Service, the State of Alaska Attorney General's Office, the Alaska Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Enforcement, and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Special agent in Charge, Stanley F. Pruszenski, complimented all of the participating enforcement personnel on their cooperative efforts, adding, "Alaska is rich in its wildlife resources. We cannot allow this resource to be exploited for commercial gain."

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